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NAVY MEDICINE IN FOCUS

## Going Green: Naval Medical Center Portsmouth's ORCA Devours Waste

BY VJOHNSON – MAY 1, 2014

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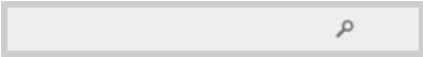
By Deborah R. Kallgren, Naval Medical Center Portsmouth Public Affairs

There's an ORCA in the Naval Medical Center Portsmouth galley, and for the past several months, it has been doing a whale of a job.



Chad Yalung, food service employee, adds non-usable food into the ORCA in Naval Medical Center Portsmouth's galley. The compost accelerator turns food waste into gray water in 24 hours. (Photo by Senior Chief Mass Communication Specialist James E. Perkins)

ORCA stands for organic refuse conversion alternative, and unlike a composter in the garden which can take months to break down green waste, this machine takes just 24 hours to compost solid food waste into liquid gray water.



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The food composter is the latest in a series of green initiatives undertaken in the galley, and it has reduced the weight of trash, reduced the volume going to landfills, reduced the number of drain clogs, and reduced the load on the garbage grinders. Even better, staff like it.

ORCAs have been around for a few years, and NMCP is the first naval hospital to adopt it on site. The machine is described as a compost accelerator.

“We dump all non-usable food into it; everything that comes off the (galley) line or salad, leftovers, vegetable waste,” said Cmdr. Paul Allen, Nutrition Management department head. “It combines water, agitation and biochips. The biochips include enzymes that accelerate the process of bacteria eating the food.”

Once the food is transformed into gray water, it is disposed of through the sewer system.

“It’s all environmentally friendly and safe,” Allen added.

Totally Green makes the ORCA and says it “uses aerobic digestion to break down incoming food waste and the residual can contain as little as three percent of the weight of the original food waste.”

The ORCA is about one quarter the size of a dumpster, and has been in use at NMCP since the beginning of 2014. “It’s been working great,” said Allen.

Galley patrons never see the ORCA, which is located in the scullery, away from the serving lines. Allen says the staff enjoy using it, because the ORCA has advantages over the old garbage grinder, which is messy, loud and prone to clogs.

Food service employee Chad Yalung likes the ORCA. “It’s great. Instead of filling trash cans full of food and having to take it to the dumpster, I put it in the ORCA. It saves time and energy and it’s environmentally safe.”



Chad Yalung, food service employee, adds non-usable food into the ORCA in Naval Medical Center Portsmouth's galley. The compost accelerator turns food waste into gray water in 24 hours. (Photo by Senior Chief Mass Communication Specialist James E. Perkins)

“A major issue in the galley is that drains are tough to maintain,” Allen said. With the ORCA, “The labor of using the garbage grinder is significantly reduced.”

Not only does the ORCA reduce drain clogs, the enzymes help scour the sewage pipes, keeping them free of blockages.

“The effluent breaks down the organic material in the sewage system, keeping (the pipes) clean,” Allen added. “The filter sees what’s not getting composted, but even chicken bones get composted.”

The only food waste that does not go into the ORCA is grease. The used oil is sold to a contractor who recycles it.

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The galley also reduces waste in other ways. Allen said, “We use biodegradables for our in-patient meals. We also recycle cardboard, steel cans and plastic containers.”



About vjohnson